



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

For Information Contact Public Affairs
WYN HORNBUCKLE
Telephone: (602) 514-7625
Cell: (602) 525-2681

ALIEN SMUGGLER SENTENCED TO 84 MONTHS AFTER WOMAN DIES IN THE DESERT

PHOENIX – Cristino Lopez-Martinez, 21, of Mexico, was sentenced here to 84 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release, by U.S. District Judge Stephen M. McNamee. Lopez-Martinez had been found guilty by a federal jury on November 16, 2006 of Conspiracy to Bring in Illegal Aliens, Bringing Aliens to the United States, Bringing Aliens to the United States for Profit and Reentry After Deportation.

Cristino Lopez-Martinez, 21, was sentenced to 84 months in prison after being found guilty at trial of Conspiracy to Bring in Illegal Aliens, Bringing Aliens to the United States, Bringing Aliens to the United States for Profit and Reentry After Deportation. The defendant and his two co-defendants guided a group of twenty-two illegal aliens into the United States, on foot, in September 2005 when temperatures were over 100 degrees. The smugglers lied to the aliens about how long the trip would take; therefore, the aliens did not bring enough food or water for the nearly three-day hike. On the last day of the trip, all of the aliens ran out of water. A young mother of two, who was traveling with her husband and one year old and two year old daughters, collapsed and died in the desert. The group had walked over fifty miles. The defendant and one co-defendant then abandoned the group. A border patrol agent, flying a helicopter, located the group shortly after the woman died, and provided the group with water. The woman's two year old daughter was unconscious when the agent found them, but regained consciousness after receiving water. Border patrol agents found the defendant and his co-defendant approximately ten hours later at a gas station near Yuma, Arizona. They had just purchased snacks and drinks for themselves, and when asked if they had left anyone behind in the desert, they stated "no." The defendant is a previously deported felon with a prior burglary conviction.

The investigation in this case was conducted by ICE agents in Yuma, and Border Patrol agents in Yuma and Wellton. The prosecution was handled by Jacki L. Ireland and Tracey Bardorf, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-05-1145-PHX-SMM
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